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R 160927Z MAY 08

FM AMEMBASSY HANOI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7846

INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 4738

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7123

RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 0898

RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0522

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0102

RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS HANOI 000581

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SNAR KCRM SOCI CH PK VM

SUBJECT: VIETNAM'S BIGGEST EVER SEIZURE OF MARIJUANA

¶1. Summary. The May 13 seizure of eight tons of marijuana resin by GVN authorities was the biggest such seizure ever in Vietnam. The drugs were found in two shipping containers transiting Mong Cai border gate in the Northeastern province of Quang Ninh into China. The shipment originated in Pakistan and had entered Vietnam at the Port of Haiphong. In order to carry out the seizure, given its scale and complexity, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) established a special interagency task force to handle the case, including coordination with other countries. The seizure highlights the resourcefulness of drug traffickers and the fact that international counternarcotics efforts are only as effective as their weakest link. INL-funded Contraband Enforcement Training was held in Haiphong last year and may have contributed to this successful outcome. End Summary

Drugs Destined for China

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¶2. On May 13, MPS Counternarcotics Police (C17), Quang Ninh Provincial police, sea police and customs forces seized eight tons of marijuana resin (aka hashish or concentrated marijuana) and arrested five trafficking suspects carrying Chinese and Indonesian passports. The two drug-laden containers had been unloaded at the Port of Haiphong and were en route to China overland when they were seized at the Vietnam-China border crossing at Mong Cai in Quang Ninh province. According to press reports, the cargo was declared as jeans originating from Pakistan and the intended destinations were China and Canada. Colonel Nguyen Anh Tuan, C17 Director, said the seizure resulted from "suspicion about a huge trafficking ring."

Biggest Ever Transnational Seizure

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¶3. Vietnamese press characterized the bust as "striking a blow against the mafia world," and as the biggest drug seizure ever made by GVN law enforcement agencies. Given the scale and complexity of the operation, MPS Minister Le Hong Anh established a special task force headed by MPS Vice Minister Le The Tiem to work with the concerned countries in order to crack down on this trafficking ring.

Comment

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¶4. The incident highlights for GVN officials the increasing threat posed by international drug traffickers, and not only from the Golden Triangle. Limited GVN counternarcotics enforcement capacity combined with opportunistic traffickers make such drug trafficking cases a growing challenge for the GVN. The rapidly increasing amount of cargo passing through Vietnamese ports is not matched by increased resources for container inspection. Although details about the role of Haiphong and Quang Ninh Customs officials in the bust remain unavailable, INL-funded Contraband Enforcement Training conducted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection personnel in Haiphong in August 2007 provided training to these frontline

officials that would have been directly relevant to this drug seizure. We expect that future training and equipment assistance provided by INL and other USG programs will further build the GVN's capacity to combat multinational drug trafficking.

MICHALAK